

Plant Was Vital Cornerstone In Economy for Four Decades

By JOSEPHINE ZIMMERMAN

Utah Valley's entry into the steel-making industry came about through the fortuitous combination of abundant raw materials, men with foresight and optimism, and the right timing for financing.

An account written in 1951 by L.F. Rains who, undoubtedly, could be called the father of the Columbia Steel Company's Ironton plant, relates how he came to Utah in 1910 and invested in coal mining property, which he developed over the next few years.

In 1919 he was contacted by partners in the newly-organized Utah Coal and Coke Co. which had signed a contract on 3120 acres of coal coking lands near Sunnyside in Carbon County. Worried that they might forfeit the payments they had paid (\$50,000 per year), and lose the property, they asked Mr. Rains take over and put the property to work.

Major Hurdle

Mr. Rains realized there was insufficient demand for the coal locally, but there might be a market if it were made into coke. Another major problem was the need to construct 11 miles of railroad to the mining property "through very difficult and mountainous country" at an estimated cost of \$1,500,000. Another \$1,500,000 was estimated to be the cost of building a townsite, securing necessary water rights, and properly equip the mining property.

worthwhile.

Freight Rates

The new company was incorporated in November, 1922, and construction got underway. Favorable freight rates provided by the railroads made the new plant a profitable producer of pig iron for the foundaries and open hearths at Pittsburg, Calif., where steel, rod, wire, nails, and sheet metals were manufactured.

The Ironton plant began making pig iron on May 1, 1924, according to Mr. Rains, who wrote that "Columbia was most fortunate in having all operations managed by men who were deeply interested and determined to make the company a success."

One of those men, Albert E. Terry, well-known Provoan, recalls that he was teaching school and serving as a school principal in Milford when, at his fiancée's urging, he decided to change occupations. He applied for work at the new plant, was hired by W.R. Phibbs, the first superintendent, and helped charge the first oven.

Mr. Terry, who rose to become head of the coke plant at Ironton before transferring to the same position and eventually to the general superintendency of Geneva, said the raw materials, included good quality iron ore, a plentiful supply of coal which was of only "passing quality" as coking coal, and lime rock available locally.

Coking Problem

July, 1944.

Kaiser Role

In December, 1947, the Kaiser-Frazer Parts Division of the Kaiser-Frazer Corp. purchased the blast furnace from the government, along with 500 beehive coke ovens in Sunnyside. Pig iron was produced for approximately one year, when a shortage of Western markets forced another closure.

In 1952 the entire plant became part of the Columbia-Geneva Division of U.S. Steel.

After closure of the Ironton operation, the plant lay idle for a number of years, although the raw materials division of Geneva used part of the office and warehouse space.

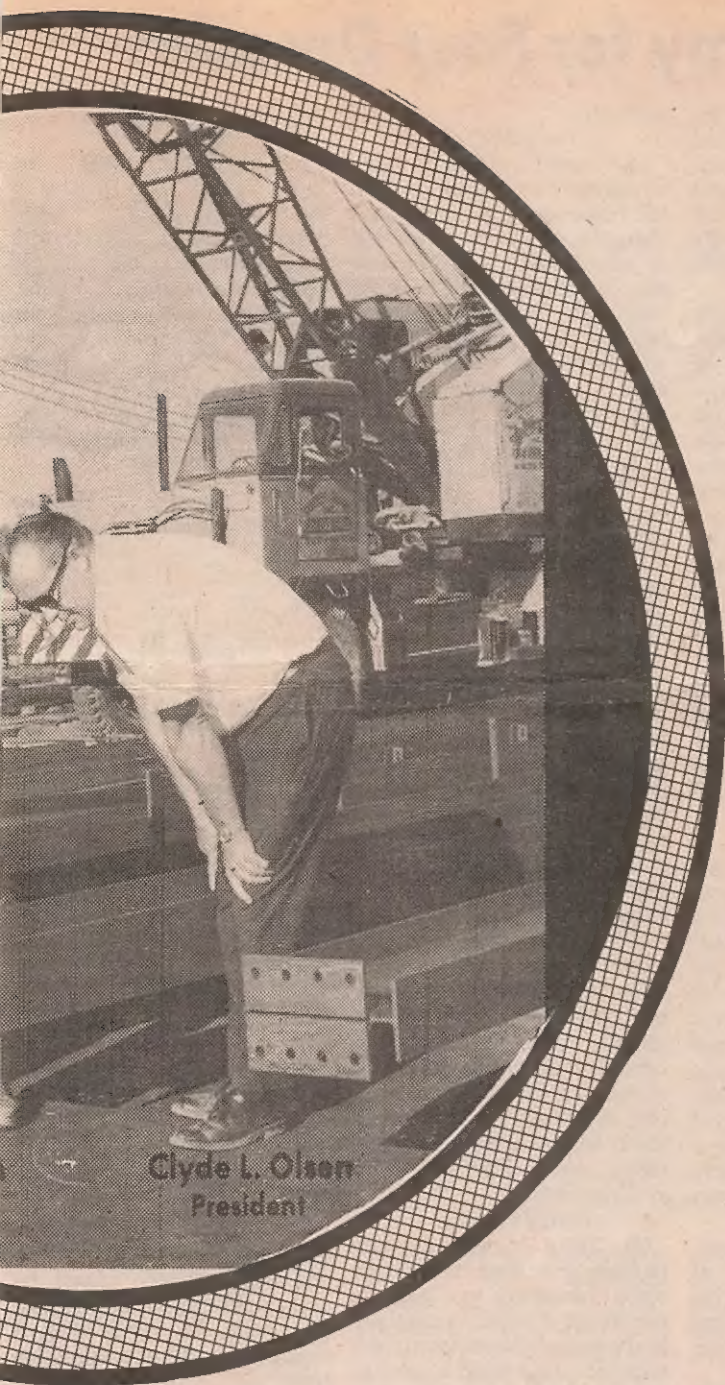
Dismantling Project

About four years ago the property was deeded to Brigham Young University, and the university let bids for its dismantling. After the removal of the steel-making facilities, the LDS Church did extensive studies concerning possible establishment of an industrial park on the site, but later announced the cost would be unfeasible. Its prospects for industrial development are still being studied with a view to developing it on a smaller scale.

Permanent discontinuation of the plant was announced by U.S. Steel on May 31, 1966, although it had been inactive after closure of the No. 1 blast furnace in Feb. 1962.

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